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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS SHOWS UPWARD TREND

REF: 10 BOGOTA 0073; 09 BOGOTA 3073; 09 BOGOTA 0852

CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Wentworth, Acting DCM; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Violence against indigenous people trended upward in 2009 largely based on several massacres of Awa tribe members in the Department of Narino in southwest Colombia. The Government of Colombia (GOC) maintains indigenous groups are not being intentionally targeted based on their ethnicity, but acknowledges that indigenous groups continue to be particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of the armed conflict. The GOC attributes the increased violence against the indigenous to the fact that indigenous people largely live in rural areas where there is limited state presence and which are strategically important to the operations of illegal armed groups. The Colombian Constitutional Court found 34 indigenous groups are at-risk of extinction. Post has included Narino as part of the Colombia Strategic Development Initiative (CSDI) and has expressed concern to GOC officials and local NGOs over the indigenous human rights issues. End Summary.

VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS GREW IN 2009

12. (U) Despite a 75% decrease in indigenous homicides since 2002, for the second consecutive year killings of indigenous increased. According to the Presidential Program of Human Rights, 106 indigenous were killed in 2009 -- a 50% increase from 2008. (NOTE: The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) reports 111 indigenous homicides in 2009 (Ref. A). End Note.) Other indicators of violence against indigenous also worsened in 2009. According to ONIC, displacement rose by 20% (3,212 to 3,649), forced disappearance by over 100% (7 to 18), and threats by over 3000% (10 to 314). ONIC also reported an increase in forced recruitment of minors by all illegal armed groups, but did not provide an estimated number of cases.

AWA ACCOUNT FOR MOST OF THE INCREASE

13. (U) According to official figures, 60 Awa were killed in 2009 (Ref. B), representing over half of the indigenous killed during the year. The Awa number 15,000 (1-2% of the entire indigenous population) and live primarily in the southwest Departments of Narino and Putamayo. The FARC claimed responsibility for massacres in February 2009 that according to ONIC killed 20 and displaced over 400.

¶4. (C) All of the Awa killings occurred in Narino, one of Colombia's poorest departments plagued by widespread violence, an active drug trade, and numerous illegal armed groups. Narino is a corridor for drug and arms trafficking from Colombia to Ecuador. It is home to the FARC, the ELN, as well as several other illegal armed groups - most notably the emerging criminal bands (BACRIMs) Los Rastrojos and BACRIM Uraba (Ref. C). Although the homicide rate had been on the decline since 2007, Narino remains one of the most dangerous zones in Colombia. According to the Ministry of Defense, Narino registered 647 homicides in 2009 - the fourth highest in the country. Tumaco, a key focus of CSDI and major municipality in Narino, is the single largest producer of coca and has the highest murder rate in Colombia.

VIOLENCE AGAINST OTHER GROUPS

¶5. (U) In January 2009, the Constitutional Court found 34 indigenous groups were threatened with "cultural and physical extermination" due to the armed conflict. The list includes the Awa and the Nasa-Paez -- the second-largest indigenous group located in the Department of Cauca. Cauca, directly north of Narino, has also been plagued with violence, drugs, and poverty. The Nasa-Paez were the second indigenous group most affected by violence in 2009 and the most affected since 2002. The Presidential Program reports 21 Nasa-Paez were killed in 2009 and 134 since 2002. (NOTE: On January 7 this year, indigenous Senator Daniel Pinacue from the Nasa-Paez group was a victim of a failed assassination attempt in Inza, Cauca. The unknown assailant remains at large. End Note.)

REASONS BEHIND VIOLENCE IN INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES

¶6. (SBU) Indigenous groups are particularly vulnerable to the armed conflict because 78% of their population lives in rural areas strategic to illegal armed groups for growing and trafficking illicit crops. Esther Sanchez, a Colombian anthropologist and author of a USG-funded study on indigenous, told us the lack of state presence in indigenous territories, the jungle terrain, and the proximity to the Colombian borders makes them targets of opportunity. The presence of illegal armed groups in turn causes the Colombian military to concentrate in these areas and as Sanchez put it, "brings the conflict to the backyard of the indigenous." She further explained the military and paramilitaries often perceive indigenous as FARC collaborators because they co-exist on their territories.

¶7. (SBU) Indigenous House Representative Orisinia Polanco noted indigenous are susceptible to violence because they are unlikely to abandon land which is considered sacred to their cultural identity. Additionally, both Sanchez and Representative Polanco cited large capital investments in the mining and hydrocarbons sectors as a source of violence and displacement in indigenous communities. In a report published in February 2009, the Association of Indigenous of Northern Cauca (AINC) argued that investments in rubber, palm oil, and mining contributed to increased violence by illegal armed groups.

GOC: "INDIGENOUS ARE NOT KILLED; PEOPLE ARE KILLED"

¶8. (C) Ministry of Interior and Justice (MOIJ) Representative of Indigenous Issues Pedro Posada attributed the recent rise in

indigenous killings to an intensification of the armed conflict in remote areas of the country where many indigenous territories are located. He told us, "indigenous are not killed in Colombia; people are killed," suggesting that indigenous are not targeted for their ethnicity but rather their proximity to the conflict. Posada explained the Awa massacres were a consequence of the FARC defending themselves "tooth and nail" in Narino, as well as an increase in criminality due to the growing presence of illegal armed groups. He said it would not surprise him if 2010 also registered high levels of violence.

¶9. (C) Posada emphasized the GOC is concerned about indigenous deaths and is taking measures to protect them. The government has started the process of negotiating seven Safeguard and Protection Guarantee Plans (mandated by the Constitutional Court's ruling Auto 004 in January 2009). The MOIJ allocated US\$200,000 for the design of the Awa protection plan and is awaiting the initial draft by the Awa before beginning negotiations. The MOIJ hopes to implement the Awa plan by mid-year, even though the Constitutional Court ruling mandated the plans take effect by July 2009. Posada blamed the GOC's slow progress on complicated negotiations with indigenous groups. He predicted the Awa would ask the Colombian military to leave Narino and seek other similarly impractical measures.

POST EFFORTS

¶10. (SBU) Post continuously raises human rights concerns with the GOC and NGOs regarding the indigenous, and is targeting assistance to geographic zones lacking security and development initiatives. Following the September 2009 Awa massacre, the Deputy Chief of Mission met with the president of the Awa Indigenous People's Unity Association (UNIPA) and several representatives of the Awa community to offer USG assistance (Ref. A). On January 15, the Ambassador met with ONIC to discuss violence against indigenous and express USG concern (Ref. B).

¶11. (SBU) As part of the CSDI Southern Band strategy, Post has allocated significant resources in Tumaco and wider Narino. For 2009-2010, USAID committed \$6.7 million in programs for alternative development, internally displaced peoples, and local governance. USAID is also planning to roll-out a five-year \$80 million investment in Narino and Putumayo in 2010-2011. The MILGROUP disbursed over \$6 million of Foreign Military Financing and Department of Defense funds for humanitarian assistance programs, maritime and riverine interdiction, and other security efforts. Finally, NAS has invested heavily in rural policing, interdiction and illicit crop eradication programs in the region, including providing flight hours to support Colombian police and army units and humanitarian missions.

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